

This Week in Congress

November 13, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Honoring our Nation's Veterans

Our country observed Veterans Day this weekend, a day set aside to honor the 250,000 veterans in Kansas and the 24 million nationwide who have stepped forward to answer the call of duty and defend our way of life. On Veterans Day we pause to pay tribute to those who have given so much, to those who continue to give and to those who gave all on our behalf. I participated in several events this week to honor our nation's veterans.

Fort Riley Veterans Cemetery Groundbreaking: On Sunday, I traveled to Fort Riley to break ground on the new Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery. It was an honor to join veterans, soldiers, community and state leaders, officials from the VA and members of the congressional delegation who have worked so hard to make the veterans cemetery a reality. The Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery will provide an honorable re*sting space and be a lasting tribute for our Kansas veterans, commemorating their service and sacrifice on our behalf. Whether it is Arlington National Cemetery or the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery, these memorials send the same message: We remember. We are grateful. We will never forget.

[Click here](#)

to read my remarks from the groundbreaking.

[Click here](#)

to learn more about the new cemetery.

World War II Veterans in Washington, D.C.: A group of 35 Kansas World War II veterans traveled to our nation's capital this week to view the World War II Memorial on the National Mall. I joined former Kansas Senator and World War II veteran Bob Dole to welcome the veterans to Washington, D.C., and thank them for their service. Brian Spencer of Lyndon helped put the trip together with the help of the nonprofit group Honor Flight that organizes free one-day trips for veterans. A group of Lyndon High School students accompanied the veterans on the trip and held a ceremony at the World War II Memorial to honor those who served in the war.

It was an emotional morning for me, the veterans and those who escorted them to Washington, D.C. Whenever I visit the war memorials on the National Mall, I am reminded of the great sacrifice so many brave men and women made on our behalf. They are the ones who have given us the freedom and opportunities we have today. It was meaningful for me to be able to thank these veterans personally on their first visit to the World War II Memorial. [Click here](#) to view photos from the visit.

Eskridge Veterans Day Parade: I participated in the Eskridge Veterans Day Parade and 9th Annual Generations of Valor Veterans Day ceremony on Saturday in Wabaunsee County. It was great to be a part of this tradition honoring the community's veterans. Special thanks to Vernon Breeden for driving me in the parade.

Supporting Affording Housing Opportunities for Enlisted Soldiers

On Tuesday, I spoke in the House of Representatives to raise awareness about legislation I introduced with Senator Pat Roberts earlier this year to expand affordable housing opportunities for enlisted service members, particularly soldiers relocating to Kansas as Fort Riley continues to grow.

The Military Access to Housing Act would prevent lower ranking military personnel and their families from being discriminated against when applying to live in off-base affordable housing built under the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program. Our nation's military families deserve access to safe, decent, affordable housing, but unfortunately many are being unfairly disqualified under current law.

Though my legislation was not included in tax legislation the House approved this week, I am hopeful that Congress will act to pass this important measure to ensure a good home for those who serve our country in the military and their families. [Click here](#) to watch my remarks given on the House floor.

Learning about Plans to Reduce the Social Security Disability Backlog

I joined Kansas Representatives Todd Tiahrt, Nancy Boyda and Dennis Moore this week in a meeting with Social Security Administration (SSA) Commissioner Michael Astrue to discuss actions SSA is taking to reduce the backlog of citizens waiting to have their Social Security Disability claim heard. In August, the American Association of People with Disabilities released a report showing that Kansas has the worst backlog of claims of any state in the country. I was pleased to hear Commissioner Astrue say the long waits Kansans face are unacceptable and that eliminating this backlog is his top priority.

The Commissioner's plan to tackle the backlog in Kansas includes an initiative to bring two new judges to Kansas so that more cases can be heard. He also shared plans to have judges from other states help reduce the workload in the Wichita and Kansas City offices. The potential also exists to use video conference technology to allow judges to hear cases from a main office in Virginia. I will continue to monitor the implementation of these plans to see that Kansans applying for disability benefits receive a timely decision.

House Passes Important Funding to Enhance Smoky Hill Range near Salina

The House approved the final version of the annual funding bill for the Department of Defense on Thursday, which now awaits the President's signature. This legislation includes funding I secured to enhance training capabilities at Smoky Hill Air National Guard Range near Salina.

The Kansas National Guard and the Congressional Delegation are working hard to develop Smoky Hill Range as one of the premier joint training installations in the country. Funding for projects at Smoky Hill is an important step toward that goal. The resources will ensure modern facilities and training sites for soldiers, airmen and first responders working at the range. These projects are not only good for our troops, but also for the Salina community as it will benefit from the growth.

The legislation also includes a 3.5 percent pay raise for service members, blocks proposed increases in co-pays and fees under the military's health care plan known as TRICARE and provides \$980 million for the National Guard and Reserve to purchase equipment for their missions overseas and to better respond to emergencies at home.

House Judiciary Committee Approves Community Pharmacy Legislation

The House Judiciary Committee this week approved H.R. 971, the Community Pharmacy Fairness Act, that I introduced with Congressman Anthony Weiner of New York. This legislation would exempt independent pharmacists from antitrust laws so they could collaborate in negotiating contracts with health insurers and pharmacy benefit managers. The bill would help level the playing field for our Kansas pharmacists and curtail the rising cost of prescription drugs. I will continue working to see that H.R. 971 is brought before the House of Representatives for a vote.

Discussing Veterinarian Shortages in Rural Areas with USDA Official

I visited with Gale Buchanan, Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this week to express my displeasure at the lack of progress USDA has made in putting in place a program Congress created in 2003 to forgive the education loans of veterinarians agreeing to work in underserved areas. Although the National Veterinary Medical Service Act was passed in 2003 and funded in 2005 and 2006, rural areas have yet to see any increase in private practice veterinarians as a result of this program. Veterinary services are essential in protecting food safety and public health, yet more and more Kansas communities now suffer from a shortage of these services. I will continue to work with the veterinary medical industry and USDA to make sure our farmers and ranchers have adequate care for their animals.

Visiting with Ulysses High School Students

On Thursday, I visited with Mary Schartz's students at Ulysses High School via video conference technology from our nation's capital. Young people learning about how our government works deserve an opportunity to visit with an elected representative and ask questions about issues they are concerned about. While I try to make as many visits to Kansas high schools in person as possible, video conference technology allows me to visit with students while I am in Washington, D.C. I talked to the students about my role as their representative in Congress, the war in Iraq and about the importance of honoring our nation's veterans. The students were also able to visit with Nicole Young of Ulysses and Mark Colwell of Hays who work in my Washington, D.C., office. Thank you to Assistant Principal Ron Smith for being a part of the discussion.

Honoring the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art

I recognized the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art in Manhattan during a speech this week in the House of Representatives. The museum, which sits on the campus of Kansas State University, completed construction of the Mary and Morgan Jarvis Wing in October. Educational programs, lectures and workshops will be offered in the new addition. Congratulations to Ross and Marianna Beach, K-State President Jon Wefald and his wife Ruth Ann, and Museum Director Lorne Render on making the museum such a valuable resource for the state. [Click here](#) to view my remarks.

Celebrating Student and Teacher Success in Hays

I joined teachers, staff and administrators yesterday at a reception in Hays to celebrate high levels of student achievement in Hays USD 489 schools. This year, students in each school in the district scored high in reading and math on the yearly Kansas assessment test. For scoring so highly, all schools in the district were given the Standard of Excellence rating by the Kansas State Department of Education. USD 489 has received the Standard of Excellence award in various subjects and grade levels for the past 10 years.

Having great schools is an accomplishment we all can be proud of. Congratulations to Superintendent Fred Kaufman, School Board President Alan Moore, and all of the school board members, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents and students.

Participating in the Opening of Facilities at Memorial Health Systems in Abilene

On Saturday, I took part in a pair of ribbon cutting ceremonies for new facilities at Memorial Health Systems in Abilene. The organization officially opened the Learn and Grow Depot and Village Manor this weekend. The newly-constructed Learn and Grow facility will provide developmental services for children. The facility features a state-of-the-art technology that allows parents to view their child's classroom via the Internet so that they can check on their children during the day.

The other renovated facility, Village Manor, is a 72-bed skilled nursing facility that has embraced the person centered care concept. The renovation includes four households and commons spaces that are more home-like and less institutional. Thank you to Director Jill Nusbaum, Director Amy Hoch Altwegg and Hospital Administrator Mark Miller for inviting me to this event.

Celebrating the Grand Opening of Junction City's Bartell House

I joined citizens of Junction City on Saturday to celebrate the completed renovation and grand opening of the Bartell House. The Bartell House renovation has been in the works for several years and it was good to see the final product. The Bartell House will provide housing in the two upper floors for low to moderate income senior citizens with 32 housing units. The Washington Street Grill and Pub opened earlier this summer and is also part of the Bartell House structure. The remaining space on the ground floor will be used for shops and offices. I commend the City of Junction City, USDA Rural Development, the Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka and Homestead Affordable Housing for their contributions to this project.

Speaking at the Kansas Farm Bureau Annual Meeting

I spoke with Kansas Farm Bureau members at their 89th annual meeting in Manhattan on Saturday about the progress of the 2007 Farm Bill, disaster assistance programs and other current agriculture issues. I appreciated the opportunity to speak with Kansas Farm Bureau members from each of the state's 105 counties as they keep me informed about issues important to Kansas farmers and ranchers.

Big First Listening Tour Begins

My annual Big First Listening Tour began yesterday in Inman in McPherson County. Every year since coming to Congress I hold a town hall meeting in each of the counties I represent. These meetings give me the opportunity to visit with Kansans so that I can take their concerns to our nation's capital. Next Monday, I will be in Seward County to attend the Liberal Lions Club meeting at Seward County Community College at 12:00 p.m. [Click here](#) to view the schedule for other upcoming stops.

Enjoying the Hays High School Musical, "The Pajama Game"

I attended the Hays High School annual fall musical production on Saturday. Elise Peterson directed "The Pajama Game" and my wife, Robba, was the accompanist. It was an enjoyable evening of entertainment and I was impressed by the students' musical abilities. Congratulations to all of the students and support staff, from the cast and orchestra members to the stage crew, for making this a success.

In the Office

Jim French of Partridge was in with Oxfam America to discuss the progress of the 2007 Farm Bill, which is currently being considered in the Senate. Dr. Jamie McAtee of Manhattan, Dr. Lowry Jones of Mission Hills and Paul Kerens of Leawood were in with the Kansas Surgical Hospital Association to talk about health care issues.

Tom and Sharon Soetaert of Emporia came by my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. Gale Frank and Vern Nightengale of Copeland were also in for a tour with Philip Wasinger of Virginia.

Very truly yours,

Jerry